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**2017 actions taken to provide science-based environmental stewardship  
for the health and prosperity of all North Carolinians**

**RALEIGH** – The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) took significant steps to protect the environment and provide leadership and technical support to citizens and the business community in 2017, including reforming the [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/news/hot-topics/genx-investigation/secretaries-science-advisory-board"](https://deq.nc.gov/news/hot-topics/genx-investigation/secretaries-science-advisory-board) ] (SAB).

“We are grateful for Governor Cooper’s support in expanding the board’s scope from air toxins to new and emerging contaminants like GenX,” said DEQ Secretary Michael Regan, who co-leads the SAB with Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Mandy Cohen. “The deep and diverse knowledge of this board, paired with the technical expertise and dedication of our staff statewide, will help us to make science-based decisions to improve environmental conditions for all North Carolina citizens.”

While DEQ has focused considerable, cross-agency resources on the impact of [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/news/hot-topics/genx-investigation/"](https://deq.nc.gov/news/hot-topics/genx-investigation/) ] since June, divisions achieved several other important environmental milestones this year, some of which earned major industry accolades. Among them is the Statewide Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Master Plan, hailed as a model for states challenged by significant water infrastructure needs, and the combined efforts of the Hazardous Waste and Brownfields programs to clean up and revitalize contaminated sites, enabling them to be safely repurposed for jobs-creating economic development.

DEQ also made strides in expanding industry engagement programs, including the [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/environmental-assistance-customer-service/environmental-stewardship-initiative/esi-members-list"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/environmental-assistance-customer-service/environmental-stewardship-initiative/esi-members-list) ], which celebrates the voluntary commitment of leading manufacturers to operate at a superior level of environmental performance. Additionally, DEQ expanded its mission to inform diverse communities through public meetings and support educators by launching a new science curriculum that aligns with the state’s standard course of study.

Highlights include:

[ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/permits-regulations/title-vi-compliance"](https://deq.nc.gov/permits-regulations/title-vi-compliance) ]

Secretary Regan has reenergized the entire staff and placed significant senior leadership emphasis on the importance of the department’s role in ensuring transparency and fairness in all [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/permits-regulations/title-vi-compliance"](https://deq.nc.gov/permits-regulations/title-vi-compliance) ] (Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and all other related nondiscrimination laws and requirements) and environmental justice (EJ) issues within DEQ’s purview. In 2017, the department re-engaged with the U.S. EPA and a myriad of EJ stakeholder groups within North Carolina to better learn about and address issues affecting these communities and to provide another conduit for them to communicate their concerns. DEQ has actively supported a variety of listening sessions, individual stakeholder meetings and public hearing on key issues related to coal ash, water and air quality,

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and the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. Moreover, DEQ has inserted key leadership into a variety of commissions to include but not limited to the [ [HYPERLINK "https://ncadmin.nc.gov/about-doa/divisions/commission-of-indian-affairs"](https://ncadmin.nc.gov/about-doa/divisions/commission-of-indian-affairs) ] and the [ [HYPERLINK "https://files.nc.gov/governor/documents/files/EO23%20-%20Governor%27s%20Advisory%20Council%20on%20Hispanic-Latino%20Affairs.pdf?mCq\\_GQIsvu8BTWGe7Q7nl.6bHE6jP6B3"](https://files.nc.gov/governor/documents/files/EO23%20-%20Governor%27s%20Advisory%20Council%20on%20Hispanic-Latino%20Affairs.pdf?mCq_GQIsvu8BTWGe7Q7nl.6bHE6jP6B3) ] to address Title VI and EJ challenges facing these groups.

[ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/air-quality"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/air-quality) ]

Governor Roy Cooper and Secretary Regan introduced “[ [HYPERLINK "http://itsourair.org/"](http://itsourair.org/) ],” a new air quality curriculum designed for North Carolina high school students, on April 26 to mark Earth Day. The free course provides a series of activities and videos designed to help students gain a better understanding of the science and technology used to explain, monitor, predict and protect air quality. DAQ provided hands-on training to teachers across the state to help them incorporate “It’s Our Air” into lesson plans, with more workshops planned for 2018.

In November, Governor Cooper designated DAQ as the [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2017/11/21/north-carolinians-invited-share-ideas-how-best-use-volkswagen"](https://deq.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2017/11/21/north-carolinians-invited-share-ideas-how-best-use-volkswagen) ] to manage the state’s \$92 million share of the national [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/air-quality/motor-vehicles-and-air-quality/volkswagen-settlement/volkswagen"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/air-quality/motor-vehicles-and-air-quality/volkswagen-settlement/volkswagen) ]. Public input is being received [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/air-quality/motor-vehicles-and-air-quality/volkswagen-settlement/volkswagen"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/air-quality/motor-vehicles-and-air-quality/volkswagen-settlement/volkswagen) ] on how the state should invest in projects that will significantly reduce pollution from diesel sources. Public meetings will follow in early 2018, with a plan to be finalized and projects chosen later in the year.

Additionally, North Carolina was designated as attaining the strict federal standard for [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2017/10/31/north-carolina%E2%80%99s-2017-ozone-season-ends-fewest-unhealthy-days"](https://deq.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2017/10/31/north-carolina%E2%80%99s-2017-ozone-season-ends-fewest-unhealthy-days) ] in all 100 counties. The state has steadily reduced unhealthy ozone levels since the early 2000s through partnerships with industry, local governments and environmental organizations focused on curbing air pollution statewide. This relationship provides clear evidence that a robust economy and healthy environment can thrive at the same time.

[ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/coastal-management"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/coastal-management) ]

Coastal Management awarded more than [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2017/10/20/state-officials-announce-grants-better-water-access-helping-visitors"](https://deq.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2017/10/20/state-officials-announce-grants-better-water-access-helping-visitors) ] to 14 local governments to improve public access to coastal beaches and waters for the 2017-18 fiscal year. The awards ranged from \$13,000 to \$300,000 and included projects such as boardwalks, public restrooms, kayak launches, fishing pier and parking improvements, and repair of the Yaupon Pier in Oak Island.

DCM also developed a [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2017/10/26/new-streamlined-approach-sand-placement-projects-saves-time-and-costs"](https://deq.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2017/10/26/new-streamlined-approach-sand-placement-projects-saves-time-and-costs) ] in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that will streamline a portion of the permitting process for beach nourishment projects along North Carolina’s oceanfront, saving local governments time and costs.

Additionally, \$100,000 in grants was awarded to seven coastal municipalities for local planning and management projects that will help them prepare for hurricanes, storms and growth for the 2017-18 fiscal year. Projects funded include flooding mitigation planning, flooding vulnerability, stormwater drainage and updates to land use plan natural hazard policies. Of note is a grant to Hyde County to assist in the development a watershed restoration plan to address drainage issues and improve water quality in Lake Mattamuskeet.

[ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/energy-mineral-land-resources"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/energy-mineral-land-resources) ]

DEMLR was heavily engaged in supporting the efforts of the state in addressing the impacts of Hurricane Matthew and providing Disaster Relief support across the state. The Dam Safety program responded to and inspected more than 400 dams in the two-week period following Hurricane Matthew in October 2016. DEMLR took immediate action on multiple dams that were considered a high threat/danger to the public and key infrastructure to include initiating an enforcement action to obtain a consent order requiring the owners of Woodlake Dam make the required repairs. When the owners failed to comply, DEMLR initiated a breaching of the dam

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using \$1.3 million in Disaster Recovery funds as breaching the dam was critical to protecting the downstream public.

DEMLR began implementing new and updated stormwater management rules on Jan. 1 following an extensive stakeholder process that included regulators, developers, academia and environmental groups. The new rules simplify the permitting process and provide greater flexibility while maintaining water quality protection measures.

[ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/environmental-assistance-customer-service"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/environmental-assistance-customer-service) ][ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/environmental-assistance-customer-service/environmental-stewardship-initiative"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/environmental-assistance-customer-service/environmental-stewardship-initiative) ] (ESI) recognized five more Stewards in its program, bringing the total number of [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/environmental-assistance-customer-service/environmental-stewardship-initiative/esi-members-list"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/environmental-assistance-customer-service/environmental-stewardship-initiative/esi-members-list) ] to 27. ESI's mission is to assist organizations in reducing their environmental impacts beyond regulatory requirements, thereby serving as role models for other high achieving operations.

The [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/conservation/recycling"](https://deq.nc.gov/conservation/recycling) ] provided more than \$1.3 million in recycling grants to local governments that support and grow public and private sector recycling activity. Projects modernized curbside recycling and diverted materials from the waste stream to become raw materials for business and industry, in turn reducing dependence on disposal, saving landfill space and avoiding the cost of disposal. Grants also helped counties to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of recycling services at solid waste convenience centers in rural areas, advance the recovery and recycling of mercury-containing products, and abate abandoned manufactured homes.

The [ [HYPERLINK "http://wastereductionpartners.org/wrp-home"](http://wastereductionpartners.org/wrp-home) ] (WRP) team provided on-site waste reductions and energy efficiency assessments for 164 clients across 45 counties, helping businesses and institutions save \$1.54 million in FY2017. The WRP also worked with 75 clients to divert more than 9,421 tons of waste from landfills. The value to these customers, including disposal management savings and material revenues, is estimated at \$556,000. WRP also provided water efficiency assessments for large water customers in the City of Asheville, saving customers 15.3 million gallons of water and eliminating \$72,235 in operating costs.

[ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/marine-fisheries"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/marine-fisheries) ]

The [ [HYPERLINK "http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/artificial-reefs-program"](http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/artificial-reefs-program) ] worked with local non-governmental organizations to create oyster habitat and enhance fishing opportunities. In partnership with the N.C. Coastal Federation, the division constructed the Swan Island Oyster Sanctuary near the mouth of the Neuse River. This \$3 million project was jointly funded with state and federal money. The division also partnered with the Coastal Federation to build the new, five-acre Artificial Reef-491 in the Cape Fear River near Carolina Beach State Park. The initial phase of the reef development includes construction of a low-relief habitat using crushed concrete on a one-acre site. Additionally, the division partnered with the Long Bay Artificial Reef Association, sank a 75-foot barge and deployed more than 1,600 tons of concrete pipe on Artificial Reef-430 off Oak Island. Project plans call for sinking up to another 2,500 tons of concrete materials on the site by the end of the year, more than doubling the amount of material on the reef.

Marine Fisheries processed a significant increase in the number of shellfish lease applications as in previous years. Between 2012 and 2015, the division averaged receiving nine applications; since 2016, it has received more than 100. The shellfish lease application process is labor-intensive process and takes up to six months to complete. The increase in applications is due, in part, to development of new, highly efficient culture methods and streamlined regulatory requirements.

[ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/waste-management"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/waste-management) ]

DEQ received EPA's Excellence in State Engagement Supporting Reuse award for the agency's ongoing commitment to support redevelopment and community revitalization. This award recognizes DEQ's role in the cleanup and reuse planning processes at the Ecusta Mill Superfund site in Pisgah Forest; for facilitating the redevelopment of the Martin-Marietta, Sodyeco Inc. Superfund site near Charlotte into ReVenture Park; and for promoting redevelopment at contaminated sites through Geographic Information Systems designed to provide information for potential developers on site use limitations.

During FY2016-17, the [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/waste-management/hw"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/waste-management/hw) ] program's actions ensured the safe management of an estimated 95,915 gallons and six tons of hazardous waste, 1,810 gallons and 7.36 tons of non-hazardous waste, 1,275 gallons of used oil, and 30,384 pounds of universal waste that otherwise may have been mismanaged. These

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actions also ensured that more than 1,896 individuals (mostly staff at affected facilities) that could have been adversely affected were protected.

During the same period, and celebrating the [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2017/11/21/north-carolina%E2%80%99s-brownfields-program-celebrates-20-years-recycling"](https://deq.nc.gov/news/press-releases/2017/11/21/north-carolina%E2%80%99s-brownfields-program-celebrates-20-years-recycling) ] of the [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/waste-management/bf"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/waste-management/bf) ], the division completed 55 brownfields agreements. These projects represent 1,186 abandoned, idled or underused properties put back into safe reuse, thousands of jobs created, and more than \$1.95 billion in estimated capital investment in brownfields redevelopment.

[ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-infrastructure"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-infrastructure) ]

The Water Finance Research Foundation named “[ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/regan-speak-oxford-event-announcing-statewide-plan"](https://deq.nc.gov/regan-speak-oxford-event-announcing-statewide-plan) ]” the Best State Level Water Infrastructure Master Plan in the country, helping to manage the aging water infrastructure crisis and sustainable infrastructure management and funding concerns. It was also named one of the top three most impactful and practical studies in the water industry. Also hailed by the U.S. EPA for its innovative and strategic approach in dealing with the state’s significant water infrastructure needs, the report has been viewed as a model by other states. Implementation has been proceeding through coordination and meetings with local elected officials, regional Councils of Government, and other organizations.

DWI provided over \$4.85 million in Disaster Recovery funding to communities whose water infrastructure systems were significantly damaged by Hurricane Matthew. Examples of support include over \$1.8 million to the Town of Fair Bluff for Pump Station Flood Resiliency Improvements and moving a drinking water well out of the flood plain, and \$1 million to the Town of Wadesboro for the Burns Street Basin Sewer Rehabilitation.

The division funded \$8.2 million in asset inventory and assessment grants, helping North Carolina’s utilities proactively assess their water infrastructure and actively plan for replacement and rehabilitation before failure of their systems can occur. This is an important factor in maintaining water quality, protecting public health and the environment, and promoting economic development.

[ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources) ]

The [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/drinking-water"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/drinking-water) ] section awarded 49 water treatment plants the prestigious [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/north-carolina-honors-49-drinking-water-treatment-plants"](https://deq.nc.gov/north-carolina-honors-49-drinking-water-treatment-plants) ], which is a state effort to enhance the performance of existing surface water treatment facilities. Awards are given each year to water systems that demonstrate outstanding turbidity removal, a key test of drinking water quality. While all drinking water systems must meet strict state and federal drinking water standards, these systems met performance goals that are significantly more stringent. During 2016, nearly 3 million North Carolina residents were served by these award-winning plants. The award winners included Asheville, Charlotte, Morganton, Boone, Cary, Lincolnton and Greenville, among others.

The [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/water-resources-data/water-sciences-home-page"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/water-resources-data/water-sciences-home-page) ] secured a federal grant to expand its research of 1,4 dioxane so the emerging contaminant of concern could be studied in several basins other than the Cape Fear River basin. The agency continues to strengthen its partnerships with local governments to address 1,4 dioxane.

DWR staff secured a grant to conduct additional testing for harmful [ [HYPERLINK "https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/water-resources-data/water-sciences-home-page/ecosystems-branch/algal-blooms"](https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/water-resources-data/water-sciences-home-page/ecosystems-branch/algal-blooms) ] so the state is better equipped to alert the public to avoid the blooms when they are forming. Some naturally occurring algal blooms often grow in fresh water lakes, ponds and canals and use the sun to grow large. Such blooms can be harmful to human health, pets, livestock and aquatic plants.

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